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Chair

Mrs. Karen Vecchio

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): Good afternoon and welcome to the 107th meeting of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. This meeting is public. Today we're continuing our study on the barriers facing women in politics, and I'm pleased to welcome both Kayleigh Erickson and Shal Marriott. Shal, of course, is here by video conference from St. John's.

I will now turn to floor over to Ms. Erickson for her opening statement.

You have seven minutes.

Ms. Kayleigh Erickson (As an Individual): Thank you.

I am often asked what I believe the future of politics could look like. In response I tend to think of a historic moment on March 8, 2017, when I took my seat in the House of Commons alongside 336 fellow Daughters of the Vote. I'll never forget the sense of pride and hope I felt looking at a Parliament filled with women—68 of them indigenous delegates, one of them being the first trans woman to take her seat in the House. I left the chamber with renewed confidence in the capacity of our political institutions to be inclusive and representative, but also aware of the work and commitment it would take to make this a reality.

To understand the underrepresentation of women in Parliament, we need to examine political parties' internal policies mandating the recruitment of diverse female candidates, the context in which these policies are being adopted, and the responsibility parties have in considering the ridings their candidates are running in. In the absence of legislative measures and the lack of formal actions, such as quotas or targets, steps to address gender parity are taken on a voluntary basis by political parties.

The result of the last B.C. election is indicative of the impact that these voluntary measures can have. While one-third of female candidates running were elected, the NDP's self-imposed equity policy resulted in 46% of their elected MLAs being women, compared to the B.C. Liberals' 32%. Federally, the NDP doesn't run nomination races until it's demonstrated that efforts have been made to recruit diverse candidates, and has committed to an equity-seeking mandate. The success of this proactive, nomination-based mandate was demonstrated in the 2015 federal election, as 43% of the candidates running for the NDP were women compared to just 31% of Liberals, and less than 20% of Conservatives. This ongoing

struggle to recruit female candidates is emblematic of broader structural issues, such as a lack of clarity and transparency in nomination processes. What exactly does it mean to demonstrate efforts to recruit diverse candidates?

To create effective and intentional strategies, political parties need to ask themselves, what needs to happen to get women to opt-in and what does it mean to be qualified for political office? Fox and Lawless have shown that men aged 18-25 are twice as likely to say that they've thought about running for office many times, and have been encouraged to do so by others. When women are frequently asked to put their name forward, their likelihood of thinking about running for office increases dramatically. When asked a hypothetical question about whether they'd run for a political position in the future, 51% of young women said no compared to 31% of young men.

In addition, there's a 30% gap between men and women in thinking that they're not qualified. While attempting to put together a diverse slate to run in a student election at the University of Victoria, I asked numerous women to run for executive positions, and the responses were, why me? I'm sure there's someone better than me for this position, and I've never thought about running for political office. By contrast, a majority of the men I asked either immediately agreed to run, or declined for reasons unrelated to their ability to hold an executive position.

Even when women run, they are under-represented in winnable ridings. In the 2015 federal election, women running for the Liberals and Conservatives won less frequently than their male colleagues. As the president of the Young Liberals of Canada in B.C., I paid particular attention to the outcome of our last election in which more than half of men running for the provincial Liberal party won their seat, while only 39% of women won theirs. While the gap is smaller in the NDP it still exists. Therefore, putting women in another party's stronghold is not just a federal or a centre-right issue. A long-term study found that women were less likely to run in their party's stronghold, less likely to run in competitive ridings, and more likely to run in another party's stronghold.

The political culture within our institutions creates additional barriers. Politically engaged women encounter gender bias in media representations of female politicians, hear gender-based heckling, and are aware of the whisper network around sexualized violence and harassment. Women, as a result, may be less inclined to run for office. One of the questions that media outlets repeatedly ask women in politics is, how do you balance your family and professional life? The male colleagues, on the other hand, are instead asked about their careers. This perpetuates gender-based assumptions of women's responsibility as caregivers, while reinforcing the outdated belief that men are naturally acclimatized to the public sphere. The language we use can either reinforce or dismantle pre-conceived ideas, and its impact is clearly demonstrated in the usage of heckling in parliamentary sessions.

A United Nations survey of elected women revealed that women experience daily condescension, including being shushed, told to calm down, and to be nicer. Additionally, research has shown that men heckle more than women, that women are interrupted more than men, and that women are more likely to say they hear heckles based on gender. As a young woman who is actively engaged in politics, I have taken part in numerous political simulations. In these spaces, I have personally been told to be less emotional, had my capacity to be the leader of a party questioned on the basis of my gender, had my intelligence reduced to the colour of my hair, and have consoled countless female colleagues who heard heckles relating to their menstrual cycle and physical appearance. I have watched young women remove themselves from the room who had been facing the aggressive and hurtful nature of heckles, some choosing not to return.

• (1535)

As leaders in our society, we need to be calling out jokes and language that objectify women, as these serve to uphold a structure of sexualized and gender-based violence. Issues of sexualized violence and harassment are pervasive. I know young women staffers who have experienced objectification and violence in their roles, some of whom have been scared to come forward because of the risk to their reputation and their future in politics.

While the federal government and some provinces have created or committed to advancing harassment policies to protect them, legislation alone won't shift a culture of misogyny and abuse. Furthermore, corrective policies also contain problematic elements. For example, Newfoundland and Labrador's harassment policy fails to be survivor centred by stipulating that survivors have 12 months to submit a complaint and may not do so anonymously.

While we have a long way to go in creating safe and inclusive environments for women in politics, mentorship opportunities can provide a counterweight to gender dynamics in political spaces.

In my experience as a board member and participant in the Canadian Women Voters Congress campaign school, I have witnessed the impact of creating non-partisan spaces for women to network and to support each other. It is within these collaborative spaces that women mentor each other and encourage each other to run for office, where gender dynamics are discussed, strategies for challenging derogatory comments are advanced, and where worries about subjective political competence are quelled.

However, normally underfunded, under-staffed organizations create these opportunities. Therefore I believe we should be simultaneously overlapping female mentorship with existing youth programs and events like model parliaments to continue counter-acting our current political culture and to encourage more women to opt into politics.

Thank you for allowing me to be here today, and I look forward to any of the questions you may have for me.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Shal, can you hear me?

Ms. Shal Marriott (As an Individual): Yes, I can hear you.

The Chair: Okay. Fantastic.

Shal, you are now up for your seven minutes.

Ms. Shal Marriott: Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the committee. My name is Shal Marriott. It is my pleasure to stand before you today and speak on a subject that I believe is of the utmost importance in politics today, and that's the barriers that actively face women.

I wish to make it clear that the perspective I'm speaking from is not one that's grounded in empirical facts and figures, nor do I profess to understand the intricacies of every opinion that every member of my gender has. Rather, they are personal opinions grounded in my having spent time on the Hill, in various internship programs, and in political activism. It is the position I have as a daughter, a sister, a loving partner, and a young political science student. That being said, I hope that you will find what I have to say to be thought-provoking and that it will aid in a greater discussion on the barriers women face when considering to enter and upon entering politics.

Although there is much to be said on the subject, I wish to narrow my focus to what I perceive as the greatest issue actively facing women in politics today, and that is the rhetoric around the issue itself. I will elaborate on this point by looking at how there is a lack of honest conversation around what it means to be a woman in politics, how there is an emphasis placed on the masculine virtues—in essence, politics being a man's world—and how there are distinct limitations on women holding independent political opinions without those being directly associated with their gender. I will conclude my remarks by making brief recommendations as to what women who are presently in politics can do to confront the rhetoric around the issue, as well as what men can do, and how the role that government as an institution ought to play on the subject should be less than it's already doing.

Turning first to what to expect upon entering politics, it is all too tempting to overlook the small differences and expectations that men and women have, yet these are the most important to discuss since doing so would allow an honest look at what being a woman in politics means. The example I always like to use is the fact that a man will never have to worry about the colour of stilettos he's wearing to work, whereas for a woman this is almost always a daily concern. Although it seems silly, this is a fraction of the expectations that precede women in their roles working in politics.

It doesn't stop at shoes. If we want young women who are interested in politics to feel comfortable in the world they're about to be a part of, we have to be honest about what that entails, which means having difficult conversations around such topics that have been brought to light, especially recently, around sexual harassment and workplace dynamics. In allowing and encouraging this honest discourse, we can create an environment where women have a realistic understanding of what to expect of the political world.

Now let's consider, for a moment, whom we view as great women in politics, shall we? Too often we associate their virtues with masculine virtues. The first female prime minister of the United Kingdom, Margaret Thatcher, was thought to only be successful because of her ability to act like a man, both in the House of Commons and within her own party. I think this is a commentary on her ability to be assertive and to dominate the conversation, yet why is this considered masculine? When we think of encouraging young women, why shouldn't we be teaching them to be assertive, to take charge, and to express their own mind? I think we give men too much credit and women too little credit when we simply say that these are masculine virtues.

Furthermore, why do we not actively discuss the roles that our considered feminine virtues can play? Empathy, for example, can play an important role in politics. In fact, I would go so far as to say you become a better member of Parliament when you can empathize with the constituents you're representing. Yet instead of highlighting this, we call it womanly and we shun it and say it has no place in politics. This needs to change. Instead of telling women to be more like men, we ought to be telling them to utilize their perspectives and capabilities to the best of their abilities and make their own way in politics—essentially, to be independent and free-thinking.

This leads me to my final point, which I consider the most important, the idea of women speaking their minds. In political rhetoric today, there is a tendency to classify opinions that women hold as either supporting or acting against their own gender and essentially what it means to be a woman. Simply, there are correct and incorrect political opinions to have, and if you have an incorrect political opinion, then you're not really representing women. Each time a woman speaks, she is thought to be speaking on behalf of her gender. An example of this, I think, can be seen in the abortion discussion, where women who are pro-life are slandered as anti-woman and ostracized because of their opinion.

• (1540)

This tyranny of the opinion of women is not brought about by men who have the luxury of speaking independently for their gender; rather it is the habit of women themselves who place obligations on the entirety of their gender and who are all too willing to dismiss views that run contrary to popular opinion as incorrect and in opposition to the very fundamental notion of equality for women.

This has even developed into having correct or incorrect opinions on the barriers facing women in politics, the subject of our discussion today. If we want to genuinely encourage women to become more involved in politics, which is the first step to having women in politics, we have to listen to what they have to say. We cannot tell them there are right or wrong answers to political questions, and we have to support them, regardless of whether we

agree with their opinions or not, viewing them as individuals and not merely as women.

I hope I have expressed my concern about the negative impact rhetoric has as a barrier to women in politics. Much can be done to improve this. We can host networking nights where the focus is on what it is to be a woman in politics. Women in politics themselves can draw on personal experiences and perspectives to encourage women with an active interest in politics and talk about what they can expect and the honest difficulties they will face, providing them with role models they can aspire to.

But we need to empower women so they can be successful, not because they are women but in spite of being women. Rather than continuing to classify them based only on their gender, we need to look at them as individuals.

As you're a government, I would encourage you to do nothing on the subject of women in politics. I do not believe any policies can be implemented that would shift the attitude about women in politics today. Rather, change must take place on the individual and societal level by first shifting the very way we talk about women in politics.

Thank you.

• (1545)

The Chair: That's excellent.

Thank you both very much for your statements.

We're going to begin our seven-minute round with Eva Nassif.

Eva, you have seven minutes.

[Translation]

Mrs. Eva Nassif (Vimy, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank both our young witnesses, who participated in the Daughters of the Vote initiative last year, for being with us today to talk about the barriers women face.

I'll start with you, Ms. Erickson. You participated in the Daughters of the Vote. Could you tell us what prompted you to take part in this Equal Voice initiative?

[English]

Ms. Kayleigh Erickson: I was sent the link to participate in Daughters of the Vote by my female boss, who said that because I do a lot of work in politics, she thought I'd be really great at this. I thought about it, and said I thought this was a really great opportunity for me to meet other like-minded women to discuss barriers that we collectively experience in politics and to come up with strategies for how to overcome these barriers moving forward. When looking into Daughters of the Vote, not only was it a great experience to meet other young women, but they really focused on our passions as young women in society and what we would change, so I talked a lot about sexualized violence and how we need to address it differently; how, as leaders, we need to ensure that we're creating safe and inclusive work environments; and how we need to increase the representation of women at all levels of government. My main encouragement came from others around me who told me that I should sign up for this, but also from my own political aspirations and wanting to meet other like-minded individuals.

[Translation]

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Has your participation changed your perception of female politicians?

[English]

Ms. Kayleigh Erickson: Through the experience of Daughters of the Vote?

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Yes, after your participation in Daughters of the Vote, did your perception change?

Ms. Kayleigh Erickson: I think if anything it reconfirmed the fact that women experience many barriers and that we need to work together to dismantle these barriers. It taught me the importance of holding these national opportunities for women to come together to network and discuss issues. My perspective didn't change; it was solidified by the fact that we need to do more.

[Translation]

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Are young women like you also interested in other aspects of society, like community, or just politics?

[English]

Ms. Kayleigh Erickson: I think a lot of it comes from changes I want to see in society, knowing that politics is a very direct way to advance policies to impact people's lives at a grassroots level. Another one of the issues I really care about is having universal opportunities for day care. We need to make sure that we have inclusive and affordable day care opportunities, because in this country, we know that the amount of money women have to pay changes for day care changes drastically depending on what riding and city they are a part of. That is one barrier I've noticed that impedes women's ability to run for politics.

It really started from, not only from being involved in my community and hearing experiences of other women, but also, for example, from being involved at the student political level. I ran and was successful at being president of my student society on campus. Some of the issues that made me want to run were women not feeling as though they were able to hold political office, some of the challenges around the comments that were being made towards women who do run. I wanted to ensure that I was challenging those and putting myself in a position where I could make positive changes.

Some of the issues I care about are affordable housing, making sure that, again, we're creating safe and inclusive environments for women to be part of, and ensuring that more women and diverse women are included at decision-making tables, because too often men have decided issues around health care that impact women's rights, and women aren't part of those conversations, or aren't part of them to the extent to which they can make a meaningful difference.

• (1550)

[Translation]

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Your biography says that you're an intern at Together Against Poverty Society, an organization that provides free legal support, in person, to women who are in need, who have housing problems, employment problems, and so on.

Based on your experience, would you say that these varied circumstances affect women's participation in politics? Tell us what

you see and what you hear from these women who live in financial insecurity.

[English]

Ms. Kayleigh Erickson: My time with the Together Against Poverty Society began when I was introduced to it while I was taking my social justice studies diploma at the University of Victoria. There was a practicum element, so I decided to be part of Together Against Poverty Society as a disability advocate. While part of this organization, I've seen how the various offerings of TAPS really support women, for example, their legal services.

Often when we talk about women's employment standards, we talk about the fact that there is a gender wage gap. I think this is where we're able to tackle at a systemic level women living in poverty and the fact that women are more likely to experience sexual misconduct in the workplace. TAPS is there to support these women in filing grievances, trying to figure out what their rights are, and coming forward, which I think is really important.

As for the gender wage gap in Canada, we know that women make 31% less than men. We know that it's estimated that 10% to 15% of the difference in what women are making in the workplace is based on gender-based discrimination that we can account for.

My time at TAPS has solidified my view of the fact that there are huge issues in our society and that women are overrepresented among people in Canada living in poverty. This is even more so for indigenous women and racialized women. Again, this is an organization that's understaffed, underfunded and that, unfortunately, needs to exist because of the gaps currently in government policy and the way it is implemented.

The Chair: You're done. Thank you very much.

We are now going to move on to Rachael Harder for seven minutes.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Thank you to each of you for being with us today. We really appreciate it.

My first questions are for you, Shal. You made an interesting statement at the end of your remarks. You said that government should do nothing. Can you elaborate on that further? How do we create change if government doesn't do anything?

Ms. Shal Marriott: It's amazing because I find the greatest social change takes place outside of governments and amongst the people.

I think we give government too much credit when we say they're responsible for the change we want to see in society. I think that people who pursue ambitions to be a member of government can do great things, but when it comes to the issue of women in politics, I really feel that it's best done at the societal level.

In fact, I think what the government is already doing, such as introducing quota systems, further marginalizes women and creates an environment where we're taking women who are perfectly meritorious and saying that it's because of their gender that they get a position. I think that's demeaning and condescending to women who otherwise are perfectly qualified.

When I say that government ought to be doing nothing, I do not mean that the people in government ought to be doing nothing. I would actively encourage you and other members of Parliament to go to high schools to speak about women in politics. Talk of the first female cabinet minister who earned her place in the Diefenbaker cabinet, who earned her position fighting for immigration and other such reforms, and give people role models to aspire to. Share your experiences.

I feel that the quota system that the present government has introduced is harmful and demeaning to the spirit of equality of women, and I don't feel that government policy has a place in making what are essentially societal changes.

• (1555)

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you very much.

Shal, in your estimation, would you say that we should be encouraging all women to run for public office, or is there a certain type of woman who should be running?

Ms. Shal Marriott: I think that's a really great question. I spent some time in engineering as a student, and we encountered that same sort of question. Which women ought to be in engineering? I think it's people who have a passion and curiosity for it.

When it comes to the ideal public servant, I don't profess to have an answer, but I think it should be people who care about the issues they represent, who are passionate, and who want to be involved in politics. I think we go too far when we say all women should be in politics, because many women don't want to be. They don't have those natural interests or inclinations, and that's not a bad thing.

Rather, we should be shifting the rhetoric for those who are interested in politics to feel that they can have a place there, regardless of occupation or income level—merely those who have a curiosity for it.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Is there a type of woman who should not be looking to run for office?

Ms. Shal Marriott: A woman who doesn't want to be there.

It sounds like a relatively simple answer, but I think that we go so far as to put pressure on women to pursue male-dominated careers because they are able to. I think that has a very negative impact on women.

We are all too quick to associate feminine careers as careers that women in a perfectly equal world shouldn't be in, but they want to. If they care about an occupation, they should be in that occupation, regardless of its associations.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Shal, basically what I'm hearing you say is that diversity should be encouraged, so that we have women participating who have all sorts of socio-economic backgrounds, geographical backgrounds, and ethnic backgrounds, and with different beliefs, values, and faces. I'm hearing you say that all of

these women should consider running for public office if it's a passion of theirs.

Am I hearing you correctly?

Ms. Shal Marriott: Absolutely.

Again, I don't like the idea of our painting a picture of the perfect woman in politics, just as I don't like the idea of painting a picture of a perfect member of Parliament.

In my mind, growing up as someone who's loved politics since grade 5, the ideal member of Parliament was the person who was passionate about it and represented their constituents the best. That person doesn't have a particular face, name, gender, colour of skin, background, or an income bracket.

Ms. Rachael Harder: In terms of a woman running for politics, then, we've established that women of with sorts of backgrounds, belief systems, and values should be welcome to run, as long as there's a passion and a drive to serve the general public.

Are there certain roles within that elected office for which some women are just inappropriate?

Ms. Shal Marriott: If you're referring to, say, a cabinet position or a parliamentary secretary position, which I think is what you're alluding to, then, yes, just as there are unqualified men who shouldn't be cabinet ministers or parliamentary secretaries.

I firmly believe in a merit-based system and that we have the best person for the position, again, regardless of gender. I acknowledge the fact that women may have to work harder to get equal recognition among their peers in some cases, but I feel that in many cases...especially with the women we have now in the House. We have women with fantastic resumés and incredible backgrounds who can earn those positions in cabinet and parliamentary secretary positions, based solely on merit. That is very easy to distinguish.

Of course, there are people who shouldn't be cabinet ministers or parliamentary secretaries—those who don't necessarily have the qualifications, or the resumés that would qualify them for the position. If we give those people positions based on their gender, then we're diminishing the merit of people who are perhaps in a better situation to earn and have those positions.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you.

In terms of those women who are elected and occupying a public role right now, what should their success be measured by? When the general public look at those women and the way they function in their role, how would they understand whether or not their member is being effective?

The Chair: You have a short period.

Ms. Shal Marriott: Very quickly, I think we look at it in two situations. If you're looking simply at a member of Parliament, you look at how well they representing their constituents. If you're looking at a cabinet minister, you look at how well or effectively the public can trust them to do their job. Again, I think this doesn't depend so much on gender as effectiveness and capability. For example, if you have someone in the position of foreign affairs who has no background in foreign affairs, who hasn't even taken a class on it, then perhaps we should question that. There are many people, men and women alike, who have appropriate backgrounds to be successful, and in the public view can do a good job.

• (1600)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you.

The Chair: We're now going to move on to Ms. Quach for seven minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank both of you for being with us today. What you're saying is very interesting.

You both talked about the language barriers that make women feel judged even before they have had a chance to express themselves or intervene. We often hear about intellectual self-defence courses. Should the courses you have taken be made more available to young women and women of all ages who intend to run for office?

When we are the object of comments that are a little provocative or very cutting, whether about our clothing, our physical appearance or our emotions, it is difficult to answer them on the fly. Sometimes we freeze and don't know how to react.

Maybe there's some kind of social blindness. When others around hear such comments, they don't react either and watch how the person being commented on will react. If she doesn't react, they'll just ignore it and pretend they didn't hear anything.

Do you have any comments on that, Ms. Erickson?

[English]

Ms. Kayleigh Erickson: I think that training is really important. We know that women in Canada are far more likely to agree with a statement like, "Sometimes politics and government seem too complicated for a person like me to really understand what's going on." I think by having training sessions.... I'll use the example of the Canadian Women Voters Congress campaign schools again. These are collaborative, non-partisan spaces where women are coming together to learn about issues around media training, for example, because we know that the media has a very biased view of women in the way it talks about women. Therefore you need to be prepared for when that happens. What are the strategies that women are employing when we do get asked a question that is based on our appearance or, for example, when we're called a "climate Barbie" and we're reduced to the colour of our hair?

Learning how to respond from the other women who have experienced that type of harassment and those types of comments, I think, is really important. It makes women feel more confident that

they are able to then also handle those types of comments, because you know, undoubtedly, that it is going to be directed at them at some point in their career. So, there are issues around that.

Another issue is talking about party financing and really starting to get into what it means to run for politics and providing women with the resources and support they need to be successful, because I think that women are passionate about politics. I think it's just very hard to see yourself in a political position when we know that women are so vastly under-represented in our political institutions.

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Thank you.

Ms. Marriott, do you want to step in?

[English]

Ms. Shal Marriott: Certainly.

I don't disagree with the idea of having non-partisan spaces where women can collectively share their experiences within politics—their hopes, their dreams, their fears. I think those can be very positive forces for women. That said, when we talk about training, it's a question for me, at least, of whether the government ought to be mandating training, or whether women ought to be taking the initiative to seek non-profit training.

I think the issue, when you have government taking care of something such as gender-bias training, is that you're not entirely certain of the sources or the outcomes. To me, it's a very personalized issue. When it comes to women in politics, I perceive it as a very personal issue. That is why I think the idea of women working together, discussing their issues, discussing their concerns with other people who are already in politics, is really positive. I think that media training is an incredible asset, especially with how to deal with sexist remarks. I think that can be done, again, by young women getting together collaboratively outside of government with the curiosity to do it themselves.

• (1605)

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: I'd like to thank both of you.

Since we're on the topic of the media, I have the following questions for you.

What would you like to see from the media? How should the actions of an elected politician be covered, regardless of the level of government? What can the federal government do to encourage the media to cover the actions and speeches of women politicians in different ways? Do you think they should be covered more according to the frequency of speeches or the type of text written? What about images of women in the media compared to images of men?

What are your recommendations regarding the media?

[English]

Ms. Kayleigh Erickson: When it comes to media, the most important thing is the language we're using, as leaders, to talk about women in politics. For example, during the U.S. election, which I paid attention to, Donald Trump said that Hillary Clinton did not look presidential. What does that mean, and what does it really just support this idea that women need to look a particular way to be in political office, which has many different negative connotations? I think it starts with us in terms of the ways we're talking about women in leadership positions and the way we're engaging with other women in the House. For example, not making gender-based heckles, making sure to stick to the material at hand and not making it about gender, I think is the first main point.

Then, second—

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Do you think there should be sanctions in that regard?

[English]

Ms. Kayleigh Erickson: Sorry?

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Oh, sorry. Do you think we should have sanctions for that kind of heckle?

Ms. Kayleigh Erickson: Yes. I think we need to take preventive or disciplinary actions. I know that Samara Canada commented on different types that have been looked at. I think it could come down to training—when you're elected into political office, sitting down and having conversations about ways to respectfully engage when you disagree with your colleague. There are also opportunities for the Speaker to ask members of Parliament to remove themselves for a certain period of time. I think that, by having those types of measures in place, you are very strongly committing to ensuring that women are included in the House. There are definitely measures that need to be taken, hopefully preventive but also disciplinary, if necessary.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you so much.

We're now going to move over to Marc Serré for his seven minutes.

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

This is great. Thank you so much to both witnesses for your presentation. Obviously, we have some different approaches, which is great. I always say in politics pick a lane, just get involved, and fight for your views. We have different paths to get to the same goal: to have a better Canada, a better society. Thank you both for your different opinions here.

Ms. Erickson, you spoke in your opening statement about nomination races and some barriers. Can you outline some of that for the committee? Also are you familiar with Bill C-76, the legislation that has just been submitted, and do you have any suggestions or comments related to that legislation?

Ms. Kayleigh Erickson: I'm not familiar with Bill C-76, but I can expand on what I'm talking about in terms of nomination races. It starts with your recruitment. I know, for example, that the Liberal Party of Canada has set voluntary internal targets, but has had issues in terms of being able to fulfill them. We need to be ensuring that we

have enforcement mechanisms within parties, if it's going to be voluntary, to ensure they're reaching their targets in terms of having diverse candidates.

I will give an example in terms of nomination races and what that means in terms of eventual candidates. We know that women are likely to win in very diverse communities. We know that, in the 2015 election, for example, women running for the Liberals and Conservatives won less frequently than their male colleagues. I think it matters who you're recruiting, because that then translates into potentially who can be nominated, and that has significant impacts for the types of women who are being elected into politics.

I'll give an example of a solution. Recently New Brunswick released its first proactive strategy to increase women's representation, and it actually tied per-vote subsidies to the gender of the candidates who are being nominated. Not only does this encourage parties to run women, but it provides a real financial incentive to put them in winnable ridings, where they have the opportunity to actually get elected.

• (1610)

Mr. Marc Serré: When we talk about Daughters of the Vote, participation in a model parliament, or other initiatives, we have heard how important mentorship is.

Do you have any suggestions or recommendations to the committee on the importance of mentorship programs, or have you any suggestions for us on that front?

Ms. Kayleigh Erickson: First of all, I think government has the opportunity to provide funding to these underfunded organizations that already do this really great work. For example, the Canadian Women Voters Congress unfortunately disbanded in November, so Equal Voice has committed to taking up those opportunities of having boot camp training, three days when women can come together and explore different issues and actually attempt to run their own campaign and talk about what that looks like and take on questions from the media, which is really great.

I'll use an example from Switzerland, actually. It created a women-to-women mentorship program in 1999 to reach more young women, to create networks, because we know that women, compared to men, have fewer opportunities in terms of networking with political and business communities that often financially support candidates who are running for office. In five years, that program had 250 people go through it, and the mentees said it increased their interest in politics, it brought in their network, it increased their self-confidence in public speaking, and provided better help with their career and future planning. Many will now go on to run for political office.

Mr. Marc Serré: I have another question here. I'll ask both of you, and maybe you could answer first, Ms. Erickson.

Part of the documentation we have from the analysts is that we're 60th in the world for percentage of women in politics, and in the upper and lower chambers it is 27%. It's not a large number, and it hasn't really changed a lot. Some would argue that we need to shock the system and do something drastic—possibly quotas.

France has a parity law, and Mexico has used some quotas.

I just want to get thoughts from both of you on what we can do in the very short term to possibly shock the system and really get more women to become involved and be elected in the provincial and federal chambers.

Ms. Kayleigh Erickson: There are a number of strategies that can be employed to have an impact in the short term. I think one could be a quota. For example, Rwanda has a constitutional quota. There are various different types. Legislative quotas have also been proven to be successful.

Again, it depends on the context and the countries in which you're implementing them, because they'll have different social and cultural factors that you need to take into consideration.

It's true that Canada has become a laggard in terms of women's representation, and we need to be looking to countries that have fast-tracked women's representation, which are now considered the vanguards, countries like Rwanda and the Scandinavian countries.

I think also reforming our political financing system is really important because we know that women spend 10% more than men in campaigns. We know it can cost up to \$200,000 to run a successful campaign, so we need to be providing more incentives. I know that some political parties have funds, but they're really minuscule amounts compared to how much it really costs to run.

I think those are two changes.

The third one I think is looking at our electoral system and maybe moving from first past the post to a proportional representation system.

Mr. Marc Serré: Ms. Marriott, are there any recommendations you would have? As I said, we're 60th in the world. Have you any recommendations to shock the system to get that percentage increased in relatively fast order?

Ms. Shal Marriott: I think we really need to pause and consider why it's so seemingly important that we need to shock the system. We may be 60th in the world and we may have less than 30%, but I like to think that our members of Parliament who are women are really astounding. I think we should be highlighting them and commenting on the fact that they worked hard for their position, and they are providing role models to young women.

However, when we start trying to set goals and targets, saying that it has to 40% or 50%, we don't know if voters will elect 40% or 50%. We don't know that 40% or 50% of seats in the House will be filled by women who are qualified in the view of the voters.

By setting targets, numbers, or goals arbitrarily, we are working off information that we simply don't have. What's worse is that we make women feel guilty who are uncertain about politics, or who perhaps don't want to be involved, but then feel pressured, thinking "I should do what's right by my gender; I should get involved." I do not think we want to be encouraging that attitude.

Sixtieth—who cares, when we have such strong women already here?

• (1615)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're now going to move on to our second round. We're going to start with five minutes for Stephanie Kusie.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you both to Shal and Kayleigh for being here today.

Kayleigh, I want to say that I have a lot of respect for the Canadian Women Voters Congress. I was the Alberta south chapter chair for Equal Voice, and I've gotten to know Kara Levis over the last few years. Of course, she ran for the leadership of the Alberta Party. I think she's just an outstanding individual. You're certainly in good company.

Shal, can you give examples of your own experiences where you feel you have been told the correct things to think as a young woman in politics, please?

Ms. Shal Marriott: When I first got involved in politics, I erred more on the side of free markets, free ideas, and fundamental rights and freedoms, what is typically considered right wing. That's not to delve into my personal ideology, because I feel it's not necessarily relevant in this matter, but the moment you even begin to hint ideologically that you are a woman and you are perhaps on the right wing, you suddenly get ostracized, because that's not the correct view, apparently. I hear this from many women who share my views or who are on the side of the spectrum with me, that we should be supporting government funding for everything, from day care to health care and other such programs. Again, it's not just me. It almost feels as if in political rhetoric today, many women who even consider being conservative feel ostracized, especially amongst young women. They feel that they cannot be a feminist and a conservative, because feminist values are somehow contrary to the beliefs conservatives have. I mean lower case "c" conservative in this case.

Again, the pro-life/pro-choice example, on which I don't believe my opinion matters, is something I observe quite heartily, because I have friends on both sides of that issue who are constantly demeaning and fighting one another and making it seem like there's a right and wrong answer for women.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you.

My colleague, Rachael Harder, had a similar question, but I'm going to ask this as well. If not through government policy and processes, what do you think needs to happen in society for women to obtain equal opportunities, including running for office, as you see it?

Ms. Shal Marriott: I think we need to raise greater awareness of the fact that women have been in politics, they are in politics, who those women are, and what made them successful. I believe in getting personal in this matter. You're a woman who has been elected to office. Share your experiences. Tell what they can expect, what concerns and fears you may have had—perhaps not during an election cycle, but certainly outside of it—to young women who are passionate and enthusiastic but uncertain. Don't lie to them about some fantasy of what we all want politics to be. Be honest. I think that's the greatest thing we can start doing.

Outside of that, I've always been a firm believer in talking to people one on one, going to coffee shops, and hosting town halls. The first time I ever spoke on this issue was at a town hall hosted in Ottawa West—Nepean. That was a lovely experience, because I got to voice my opinions. I got to hear others who disagreed, and we got to have a community conversation with a member of Parliament listening. I think that's really where change begins, at the grassroots level, by having one-on-one conversations, by talking about what issues are, what issues are not, and how we can better allow women to represent and express themselves.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you.

You gave an example earlier of women being deemed unsuitable for public life as a result of their personal beliefs, such as being pro-life. Do you think pro-life women should be withheld from a committee chair position as a result of holding that belief?

Ms. Shal Marriott: I'm glad you asked that, because I think that's absolutely ridiculous. I think any woman who is perfectly qualified and democratically elected ought to be able to hold a chairmanship that she deserves. I think that demeaning that woman and saying she's anti-women is against the entire spirit of a committee on women. I cannot believe that a committee that believes in the spirit of democracy and equality would do that.

• (1620)

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you, Shal.

Further to the question from my colleague, Marc Serré, do you see party quotas as harmful to women, and if so, how?

Ms. Shal Marriott: I believe that party quotas are one of the worst things we can do for the advancement of the equality of women, because they demean women down to nothing but their gender. We can scrutinize men for catcalling us because of heels, but is that worse than a woman essentially saying to another woman, "You're nothing but those heels"? That's the attitude I feel quotas represent.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you, Shal.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: That's looking—

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We're now going to move over for our next five minutes to Sean Fraser.

Go ahead, Sean.

Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.): Thanks very much. Thanks to both of you for being with us.

My first question is for Kayleigh.

You mentioned that you took part in the Daughters of the Vote exercise. Did that make you personally more likely to actually run for office in the future?

Ms. Kayleigh Erickson: I think it definitely made it more likely, because through that experience I now have mentors. I now have a network of 337 daughters across Canada who I know I can go to. I can ask questions. I can lend support. They'll help me in terms of helping with the media that I put out. They will provide me with their ideas and the experiences that they've had. Now I actually have

this really strong solidified network and mentors who came out of it who will be able to support me.

Mr. Sean Fraser: With respect to forums, or fora, that are created like that with the help of some public funding, one of the things that we got into in when Stats Canada was here is that there's not much being done to track in a longitudinal study the participation of the women who take part in these kinds of things to see whether they end up running 5, 10, 20 years down the road.

Do you think monitoring the individuals who take part in these kinds of things would be a helpful thing to understand whether they statistically prove the anecdote that you just shared?

Ms. Kayleigh Erickson: I think it would be interesting. I think from my own experience with the Canadian Women Voters Congress, we saw a number of women go on to run successful campaigns. However, I don't think it's necessarily just important for women to go on as candidates, but that they just get politically involved, whether that's working on a campaign, door knocking, or whatever that looks like. I think these are the spaces that encourage women to get involved in a way that they best see themselves moving forward, whether that's as campaign chair or, hopefully, eventually becoming a candidate themselves.

Mr. Sean Fraser: You mentioned as well that you took part in student government. I got my start the same way. One of your fellow Daughters of the Vote is currently the student union president for St. Francis Xavier University, a phenomenal person.

I'm wondering if we accept your position that, yes, this does make people more likely to become engaged or potentially even run for office in the future, whether it's student politics, whether it's mentoring Daughters of the Vote, whether it's a model parliament or model UN type exercises.... We're going to make recommendations as a committee at the end of this report that the government do this or that, or potentially do nothing, to help improve the ability of women to take part in politics in some way. How do you think we can create that opportunity for young women in particular to become engaged so we create that pipeline of potential participants in the civic discourse in Canada?

Ms. Kayleigh Erickson: I think one of them is putting more funding towards these already ongoing opportunities. I think, again, a lot of it comes down to as leaders, the language and ways we talk about women in politics. For example, in those model parliament sessions, I saw a lot of what we don't like about federal politics being recreated and mirrored in those simulations. Young women are watching how the leaders of their country are engaging on issues of gender. Unfortunately, some of those situations get recreated in those mentorship opportunities or in those opportunities where we come together.

Mr. Sean Fraser: With respect to the best way to make this a reality, if there are groups doing it already, do you think we should say, look, we don't need the government through Status of Women Canada to personally run these programs, but to find the people who have developed the expertise and fund those organizations that are either nationally or community-based that are running boot camps, model parliaments, or whatever it might be?

Would that model be a successful way for the government to engage more young women in this type of an activity?

Ms. Kayleigh Erickson: Yes, in general, but I think that if the government did come out with its own training programs, that would be a great step. But, as I said, I think it's also important to recognize that this work is already happening, albeit in understaffed and underfunded organizations. If we boost the funding, there are opportunities to expand these programs. There are opportunities to go into rural ridings where we know that there is a rural and urban divide.

Mr. Sean Fraser: We've got 45 seconds to go.

One of the struggles that we're going to have when we're trying to make political parties do things that.... Political parties for the most part are masters of their own destiny subject to what legislation requires of them. If there's one thing that we can actually be doing that's going to make political parties try to find women candidates who are out there and do want to run, what is the big take-away?

• (1625)

Ms. Kayleigh Erickson: I think the one thing, if we don't implement a quota for all parties, is to work within your parties to increase women's representation and to enforce the mechanisms that you are putting in place in your own political party to increase women's representation overall, because we know it's not just a one-party issue. It's an issue within every party.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Excellent. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'd really like to thank Kayleigh and Shal very much for being part of our first panel.

We are going to wrap up this panel, switch to the second panel, and reconvene in about two minutes.

• (1625)

(Pause)

• (1625)

The Chair: We're going to reconvene. Thank you very much, everybody, for coming back.

It's a pleasure for us to have Nancy Peckford. And, Eleni, how do you say your last name?

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos (National Board Member, Equal Voice): Exactly as it's written—Eleni Bakopanos.

• (1630)

The Chair: Oh, my goodness gracious. Thank you very much. She's a national board member from Equal Voice Canada. As well, we have Michaela Glasgo, who is appearing as an individual.

Thank you very much for coming. To begin, we're going to Equal Voice for seven minutes.

Ms. Nancy Peckford (Executive Director, Equal Voice): Thank you so much.

First of all, I salute the efforts of the committee to revisit this topic. Obviously a year out from the federal election, given some of the work that's happening across the country, it's really important to sustain this conversation and to look at new and innovative ways to get more women into politics.

Eleni and I are going to share our time. Just briefly, I'll give you an introduction to Equal Voice. I think you know that we're a 15-year-

old national, multi-partisan organization that promotes the election of more women at all levels of government, in fact.

We're excited about being here today not just because of the excellent discussion on our Daughters of the Vote program, which we are very proud of, but also because Equal Voice has a federal mandate to pursue systemic change across jurisdictions in Canada. So, the timing of this invitation was excellent because we have in fact just developed a 12-point plan, not just for the federal arena, but also for other political institutions and jurisdictions, to really assess the degree to which they are embodying both inclusive and sustainable workplaces for women across party lines.

To that end, we have a 12-point plan, and we have both a brief and a chart. I'm going to turn to Eleni to speak to some of the first pieces of that analysis that we're providing to the committee, and then I'll wrap it up.

[Translation]

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: Thank you very much for the opportunity to share our recommendations with you. The clerk has distributed a copy to all of you.

[English]

We thought we'd write it down so you'd at least have a chance to look at it. We're not going to deal with the problems, but we wanted to be very concrete in our presentation and give you some ideas of where we think there should be systemic change, which, in fact, in the long run will bring down the barriers for more women wanting to get into politics.

For those who don't know, when I got elected at 39 years of age, I had two young children of one and a half and three and a half. There's a big barrier that women keep bringing up to me all the time because the whole face of Parliament has changed. A younger generation has come forward, men and women, I'd like to say, and most of them would like to be parents. One of the greatest barriers we find is the way that Parliament accommodates those families.

There is, of course, a day care, but we are recommending more.

[Translation]

In our document, we say that we must find a balance between work and family and accommodate those who want to have their children looked after on Parliament Hill.

We ask that after-hours child care on the Hill be expanded for infants and toddlers. Often, parliamentarians are forced to sit late in the evening. Last night, for example, they finished voting at midnight. If a member has a young child, what will she do with it if her husband or someone else is not here to care for it?

[English]

We're recommending that we extend child care, and also that we have a parliamentary schedule that will in fact accommodate children.

The second recommendation we're making is to extend the leave from the House of Commons for female MPs who become parents to 60 days. At the moment, as you all know, it's only 21-day leave, which we believe does not really permit a new mother or father to be able to work. Obviously, they're working from their riding and constituency, because I don't think there's any time off for any member of Parliament, no matter what their personal circumstances may be. I've always said that it isn't a job to be a member of Parliament; it is a commitment and a public service. I think that extending it to 60 days would permit for a little more leeway to enjoy the first few months of their newborn's life.

We also want to enable virtual participation and voting in parliamentary committee meetings because we have the technology now. In my time, the technology was a little rough, but I think you can now accommodate voting. You can accommodate testimony. You can accommodate participation. We'd like to have a little more opportunity for new parents to be able to vote from their constituency and actually participate in committees, if they are unable to travel to the House pre- and post-birth. The new technology would permit that.

We would also like to reduce the travel obligation for expectant MPs and new mothers by introducing the accommodation we recommend, that is, is enabling them to do it virtually, along with other adjustments to the schedule.

I'll pass it over to Nancy.

• (1635)

Ms. Nancy Peckford: We did see in the federal budget of 2018 a commitment to expand child care services to better accommodate MPs. In addition to that, predictability is obviously an important consideration. Our systemic change recommendations are based on a global survey of what legislatures across the world are doing, thanks to some work done in collaboration with Grace Lore, a long-serving researcher with EV.

Obviously, we think that predictability in maintaining the current commitment to fixed election dates is pretty important. Also, the raging debate about how we structure the parliamentary sitting week so that we can get MPs who are parents home to their ridings, to work from their ridings, is something that we believe requires discussion. We are generally in favour of looking at Fridays as riding days.

From a sustainability perspective, which is a key question for many women in politics as well as for their male counterparts, we really support an increase to the members' office budgets to ensure that there's better constituency coverage in particular, given the role MPs are playing in their ridings as ombudspersons, liaisons, and so on. Revisiting the office budgets to ensure that constituency offices are really well supported is something we believe strongly in. As would not be a surprise to you, it is important to ensure there is competitive remuneration for MPs so that the full talent pool of women in Canada can really look at and fully pursue the opportunity to become elected at the federal level.

Finally, we speak to some safety recommendations, to ensure that there are robust harassment policies. EV has in fact developed a whole matrix of what makes for good policy. Much of what's happening federally in terms of policies in the House of Commons is

strong, but we would strongly suggest an additional measure to ensure full independence in activating, overseeing, and reporting on the results of investigations.

Finally, it's not on your chart, but we would like to also endorse what you heard from a previous witness. We think an electoral financing mechanism to incentivize parties to run an agreed-upon threshold of women would be of value. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your opening comments.

Michaela Glasgo, you now have seven minutes.

Ms. Michaela Glasgo (As an Individual): Thank you, Madam Chair, for having me here today to provide my perspective on the barriers women face in politics here in Canada. This is a topic that impacts me on a personal level, and I feel honoured to be able to share some of my experiences and thoughts in relation to this topic.

I come from a large, tight-knit, and supportive family, and their example has been an integral part of forming who I am. I was born in Medicine Hat, and I continue to make southern Alberta my home because of my love for the community and the people who live there.

It is hard to say when my interest in politics formally began, but my family has always encouraged me to give back to my community and to go about leaving things better than when I found them. Academically, my interests were varied, and so at the end of high school I decided to enrol in a Bachelor of Arts program in political science at the University of Lethbridge.

In 2015, I was approached by Ms. Harder to be a part of her campaign team, which really kick-started my volunteer involvement. Seeing a young, competent, and successful candidate in action was inspiring. It motivated me to seek positions on my local Conservative boards, both federally and provincially.

In 2017, after meeting at Daughters of the Vote, a group of friends and I founded Story of a Tory, a platform where we seek to dispel the myths perpetuated about Conservative women. This idea was born out of a dissatisfaction with how we are portrayed in the media, by organizations, and by society as a whole.

To date, Story of a Tory has published more than 50 opinion pieces and interviews, endorsed a petition that has garnered national attention and been tabled in the House of Commons, and been featured by several major media outlets. Our stories are told by six regular authors located across the nation coming from various personal backgrounds. While we do not agree on everything, we are united by a chance to change the narrative.

Recently I decided to take the plunge and formally put my name forward for elected office. I am currently seeking the United Conservative Party of Alberta nomination for the riding of Brooks—Medicine Hat.

My decision to run for the UCP was an easy one. At the organizational level, the United Conservative Party has a gender-balanced board of directors—a group of competent women and men. This was established organically, not by a method of propping up, and definitely not because of an arbitrary quota. Further to that, there are nearly 40 women currently running for party nominations in 87 ridings, with new people enlisting every single day.

As I prepared for my appearance today, I reflected upon the subject at hand. What obstacles have I faced as a woman up to this point in my life? Some may say that the decision I made to run was made all the more difficult because of systemic barriers or by general marginalization, but I reject that outright. As a woman in Canada, and especially as a Conservative, I feel emboldened by the actions of those who have gone before me. Women have been at the forefront, growing and strengthening the movement alongside their male counterparts for decades. To me, there is no better time to be a woman entering this field, especially in the province of Alberta and with the leadership of Jason Kenney.

Mr. Kenney has been direct in his desire to see more female candidates running for nominations. In an interview I conducted with him in 2017, through *Story of a Tory*, he stated:

...we as conservatives, need strong women.... We...believe in freedom...the right (of people) to define their own political values. To suggest that someone must be a captive member of an identity category adopting uniformly left-leaning values is insulting and undemocratic.

I couldn't agree more.

I would say that the most pressing issue or barrier facing women in politics today is the fact that there are parties that are determined to speak on behalf of all women as some sort of locked-in-step identity category, discouraging their freedom to self-identify. When we assume that women, as an aggregate, cannot separately associate according to their individual opinions and moral convictions, but must act according to this amorphous, socially defined gender category, we are not progressing but are actually regressing. It would be much more advantageous to acknowledge diversity of opinion and promote the freedom to associate without virtually signalling the right and wrong ways to politicize womanhood.

Further to that point, if my belonging to a political party or ability to be elected is contingent on an arbitrary quota instead of based on the merit of my actions and the strength of my convictions, that is not a win for me or anyone else.

I believe in the freedom of individual members to elect women as capable candidates. Those women, much like anyone else who expects to succeed, should knock on thousands of doors, bring forward innovative policies, and work the hardest to earn their positions.

This need to categorize women is becoming increasingly prevalent at all levels. For example, we saw it here among this very group. Ms. Harder was denied the ability to chair this committee—a decision based on reductionist assumptions that she is incapable of sober thought and unable to act judiciously and at arm's length of her personal convictions. Worse yet, in order to even be the right kind of woman, she must adhere to a certain ideological orientation.

We complain about female politicians being reduced to stereotypes such as emotional, cold, or incapable. However, with the decision of this committee to take away Ms. Harder's nomination, this narrative was promulgated directly.

• (1640)

There will never be a perfect solution to achieving gender parity in Parliament or in the various legislatures across the country, but "parity" as it's defined does not endear itself to me. Parity defined as an arbitrary and mandatory 50% is a self-defeating principle. Affirmative action will never replace organic initiative.

Women will run for political parties with a robust policy platform that accurately reflects their views. The momentum will grow the more we are treated both as individuals and as equals. As one of my fellow authors at *Story of a Tory* has put it, "if you want a seat at the table, pull up a chair."

Thank you.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much.

We're now going to begin with our seven-minute round, beginning with Emmanuella Lambropoulos.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses who are here today to answer some of our questions and to help us make the House of Commons and other political arenas more fair and equal.

First of all, the last witnesses who came on Tuesday were actually from Stats Canada. We learned that women are equally or more likely than men to sign petitions or boycott certain products, which are very political actions. However, when asked if they are interested in politics, they are significantly less likely to be interested in politics. This lends to the idea that maybe "politics" as a word is an issue, and maybe because historically men have been more involved in politics, women don't necessarily see themselves being those political figures.

I'd like to know in what ways you outreach to women. Do you specifically speak to getting women elected, or do you try to find other ways to get women interested in politics?

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: I'm going to start by saying that we have to change the language. Emmanuella, you're absolutely right. You heard me say "public service", and not necessarily "politics". I think we have to start using different language, even for men and women in politics at the same time.

I would start, first of all, by encouraging them to use other language in terms of how we identify certain aspects of the job and certain responsibilities that the job has.

For me it's "public service" and not "politics".

I'll pass it on to Nancy.

• (1645)

Ms. Nancy Peckford: I do think we have to invite women into politics. I see it all the time in multiple ways. Women are formidable community leaders but are not connecting to formal political spaces, whether it's riding associations, party conventions, or what have you. There is a specific cohort of women across party lines who are very engaged, but when you look at those who are disengaged....

I give Daughters of the Vote as an example. We were really deliberate about how we talked about politics, because we didn't. We did mention the House of Commons as a particular opportunity, and there is no doubt there are women who were very politicized, who brought themselves to the table and pulled up the chair.

However, there are lots of other women who would have not, I think, seized that moment to make an application, except for how we framed the opportunity, which was by asking the following. How do you lead in your community? How are you connected? How are you engaged? What does leadership look like to you? What's your vision for leadership? How do you want to make a difference? It was questions like those that, I think, rendered the opportunity more inclusive. Then, when they got here, those who didn't have a pre-existing connection to political spaces, I think, could better understand and feel comfortable.

I think it is really critical to think about how we use language in formal politics. We always say in Equal Voice that women are not turned off of politics and women are not unengaged in leadership. They are doing so much heavy lifting each and every day in so many ways in their community. The challenge is how to bridge the gap to the formal political arena, and I think we can unpack that in so many different ways.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you very much.

It says here that you work with all political parties to engage women in politics. What are the ways you reach out, other than... political parties?

Ms. Nancy Peckford: We create critical networking opportunities that bring in women across party lines through our 15 chapters, and also the campus chapters, where we really insist that the steering committees of each of those chapters have representation across party lines. A woman who might lean one way or another can then see themselves in the composition of our Equal Voice chapters, so that, again, women are bringing themselves in based upon who they might know or recognize in the community.

Those multi-partisan chapters are huge for us in terms of bringing women out and obviously insisting that together we all benefit from diverse demonstrations of leadership. It's like the capacity we have seen in ourselves within our organization, and the capacity of women who don't necessarily talk to each other all that much because of partisan identities, to come together and think more strategically about increasing the number of women.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: We do also hold a lot of panels where we invite people across party lines to discuss the issues.

For example, in Montreal, the Quebec chapter did a panel on exactly the challenges that some municipal councillors face when they give birth while in office, what those challenges were and how we could change the culture at the municipal level. It's not only at the

federal level. We work at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Can you speak a bit to why you think it's important to have 50% women, or at least a higher percentage of women, in political office?

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: Personally, I think that when you add women, you change the culture.

I want to respond a little bit to what was said earlier about one of the witnesses. It's not the number that is the issue, but it's been proven over and over again—analysis has been done—that you need at least 30% minimum in any institution to be able to effect change. That change is what the women will bring to the institution, so it's not....

I'm not wearing my Equal Voice hat now, but I do believe in quotas. I believe also in the system that was used in Europe where you have no less and no more than 40% and 60% of men and women in any corporate organization.

I think you have to bring this in, in order to be able to change the culture, and all women across all lines.... Diversity is the important thing also.

Nancy, I don't know if you want to add anything.

Ms. Nancy Peckford: Yes. I think we would say that no one woman should be mandated to represent all women. I think there's tremendous diversity in the panellists you've heard from, and there will continue to be.

With Daughters of the Vote as an example, again, we wanted to make sure we weren't mandating a very narrow subset of women to be the champions for all women.

Women are as heterogeneous as their male counterparts, and to that end, it's not fair to ask a woman to champion an ideology, a perspective, or a life experience based upon insights they simply do not have.

• (1650)

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Last question, do you think that if we impose quotas, or if we get more women elected, it would be because they were pressured or bullied into running for office, or do you think this would probably be by their own will?

Ms. Nancy Peckford: I think opportunity presents itself in all kinds of ways. How we get there and how parties get there is a discussion that is distinct within each party, but also more applicable to what the mechanisms are, like incentives, etc.

The Chair: That's excellent, thank you so much.

We're now going to move over to Stephanie Kusie for her seven minutes.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Michaela, I just want to thank the Story of a Tory for making me the Tuesday Tory some weeks ago. It was incredibly flattering.

In your opinion, how have Conservative women been alienated from the feminist movement, please?

Ms. Michaela Glasgo: This is one of my favourite questions.

I think that, oftentimes when we're talking about the feminist movement, there is a certain type of woman who is personified in that movement, and I think that social justice and these buzzwords are thrown along with that.

In the Conservative movement, there's a very distinct initiative not to put people into a lock and step identity category, whereas when it comes to feminism, it's all about a lock and step identity category. It's all about what hardships or what kind of interlocking inequality you can put together to create this more amorphous category of gender. For me it's less about that and more about competency.

I think that, when Conservatives are excluded from that conversation, it's hard to really call it an equal conversation, because there's a whole subset of the population that's not being addressed and not being asked for their opinion or their input at all.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you very much.

Why do you think it is so important to also have Conservative women involved in politics and running for office?

Ms. Michaela Glasgo: I think it's very simple. There are Conservative people in the country, and they deserve representation.

For me in Alberta, there's been a direct incentive by the party leader of the UCP, Jason Kenney, to have more women running, but that was by no means a propping up. I think that was just his initiative to say that women should run and that we need more women and ask why not have more women.

Women are flooding the nomination races, and that's wonderful. We've achieved parity. We've achieved these wonderful things that everybody's aspiring to, without imposing a quota, without even having to do something systematic or to change something systemically. It's come from the grassroots level, which I think makes it much more valid.

To the point of the question, it's simply because these people exist and they need to be represented.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you.

You may not know, but I'm Jason's successor in Calgary Midnapore, and I always joke I should get a T-shirt made: "I'm sorry. I'm not Jason Kenney".

Would you say it's more difficult for women in Conservative politics to get involved, relative to other sides of the spectrum?

Ms. Michaela Glasgo: Absolutely not. When you're looking at getting involved, as I said, if you want a seat at the table, pull up a chair. For me personally, some of my biggest supporters have been men. Rachel's here today and she's one of my biggest mentors, but at the end of the day, I also have Jason Kenney who has been a huge mentor and inspiration to me. John Barlow has been a huge inspiration and mentor to me, and Drew Barnes. These people in various sectors of government have been absolutely influential in

informing who I am and my politics and motivating me to go forward.

I think that as long as there's a desire to be involved, you will find a place. I don't know of any campaign that ever turns down volunteers, or door knockers, for that matter. I know I definitely wouldn't. I think as long as you have a desire, somebody will get you involved and the first step is just honing in on that.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you, Michaela.

Nancy, it's always a joy to see you. Of course, I'm the proud former chair of the Alberta South chapter of Equal Voice, so the organization has a very dear place in my heart. You know that a major reason I took on that role—actually thanks to Lynne Hamilton, who's also in the audience here today—was that I felt it was so involved and the first step is just honing in on that.

With that, why is it important that Equal Voice is multipartisan? Why is that so important for your organization, please?

Ms. Nancy Peckford: We believe that any woman who wants to serve in public life and pursue elected office absolutely deserves a fair shot at it, just as with their male counterparts. We don't have a lens in terms of issues or ideology; we're really about representation. This is a democracy. Unfortunately, we've suffered for centuries now, some 151 years, from lopsided representation, and we believe women are critical to every single political party and political mechanism that exists.

We can't fulfill our mandate without really believing that women get to decide who they want to run for and what their life experience and values suggest, what that expresses itself as in terms of a party affiliation.

What we also know about a lot of women, believe it or not, is that they don't actually come in with a strong partisan identity. When they're considering running, many women who have never been connected to formal political spaces are actually in huge internal debates about where they land, because of, I think, how women are less connected to formal political spaces. Even at an early age, even at a student government level, we see that women are often making really tough choices and they could go a number of different ways, depending on the party leader and what's happening within whatever jurisdiction they're thinking of running.

• (1655)

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: That's one of the reasons we give an opportunity at panels for them to get the viewpoints of each of the individual parties. We do not influence in any way the choice, but we have that debate and we hope to continue to have that debate so that women can choose on their own how they see themselves in the political spectrum.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you.

On a similar note, why is it important to have women from all parties involved and running for office?

Ms. Nancy Peckford: We did an analysis in the last election that suggested that there were 97 ridings where if you wanted to vote for one of the three major parties, you couldn't, so think about that.

A third of Canadians were going to the polls and they didn't have a single woman to choose from. We just feel this is profoundly unfair to Canadians, not just women but to Canadians, who, in fact, do want to see more women in politics across party lines. For women not to be better reflected in riding by riding democratic choices across the country is absurd, and if... Those were the federal numbers in 2015, but we have provinces and territories in this country that are fielding many fewer women in proportion to their male counterparts.

We've got to do better for Canadians really. I think it's about Canadians. Poll after poll demonstrates that Canadians actually do want to see more women on the ballot. They want the choice. From our perspective this is really about giving Canadians reasonable and fair choices in terms of who they want to see serve them in whatever capacity it is.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: That goes back to the political parties and the choices they make.

The Chair: No, it's okay. I'm finding this panel fascinating. I'm taking lots of notes.

Thank you very much.

Ms. Quach, you have your seven minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank our three witnesses for being here. Their testimony is very interesting and allows me to have different opinions on the issue.

I represent the riding of Salaberry—Suroît, a very rural riding. Julie McNeil, a young woman from my riding, attended and was delighted. I find it interesting to hear from women from rural areas as well.

Do you think the government should invest more in the... A lot of information doesn't necessarily reach rural areas. According to a Statistics Canada study, women themselves said they lacked information.

Do you think more initiatives should be aimed at informing women more?

When I went door-to-door, although I wouldn't know exactly how often, I was often greeted by women who told me they had no opinion about it and went to get their husbands. It really happened to me a lot.

Do you think this should be supported by the federal government?

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: I think Elections Canada needs to have a system, as was done during the last election campaign. It did that for young people. I think it should do the same for women. However, we can start with the basics. The country's education system doesn't include any civic participation courses. As citizens, we not only have rights, we also have responsibilities to our country and to the system. We talk a lot about our rights, but we talk less about our responsibilities as citizens. Elections Canada is a non-partisan organization, that is, it isn't part of the political system, and it needs to do more.

As far as rural areas are concerned, it's true that few women stand as candidates during an election campaign. Perhaps it's because they have major responsibilities, for example because they work on the farm or in agriculture.

I don't have a solution to suggest, but I'd ask you to study the few possible solutions we offer. Personally, I think it will help women with children to consider a career in politics.

• (1700)

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Do you think that our electoral system, a first-past-the-post system, could help in terms of diversifying political representatives, in order to have women, of course, but also racialized people and indigenous representatives? Do you think that having a proportional system could help diversify representations?

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: Equal Voice hasn't taken a position in favour of one system or another. I think the important thing is to have any system. Even if a proportional electoral system were used, it would still be the leader who would decide who would be on the list first or second. It wouldn't make much difference unless you change the culture and the way women themselves demand change. We have to take that into account, but we can do small things.

I'll give you a very simple example. The members' pictures could be on the ballot. Why are there no photos to help illiterate women? I worked at the provincial level for 30 years, and the subject always came back on the table. In Quebec, there are now photos on the ballot. This will help voters, men or women, to know who they are voting for. It is very simple.

People work in polling stations. Most of the time, they are women, but often they aren't paid or are paid a minimum wage. Some don't want to work there because they are on social assistance. If we work in a polling station, we see our benefits reduced for having participated in democracy.

I think there are many things that could change the system to encourage more citizen participation in general and more participation by women.

I know that's not the subject of your study, but it's all connected. If the voting system is changed, more women will want to run in politics, regardless of the level of government.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: You are not the first to talk about the lack of networking for women. Initiatives have been supported by Status of Women Canada. During the last municipal elections, for example, more and more initiatives were carried out by and for women in general.

Should the federal government add more, not only during elections, but also between them?

[English]

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: Yes, absolutely.

Ms. Nancy Peckford: With 150 years of lopsided, overwhelmingly male representation—with some good men among them, of course—I think we have a moral and ethical obligation to ensure that we make sufficient efforts to connect women to political spaces.

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Perfect.

As far as racialized women are concerned, within Equal Voice, are you involved in trying to find women so that they can get involved in politics? What strategies do you use? What could we draw inspiration from?

[English]

Ms. Nancy Peckford: From the perspective of Daughters of the Vote, as our signature initiative, we were incredibly deliberate about who we chose, in part because of the kinds of questions we asked, and then what criteria we applied to the evaluation of those questions. I think you certainly have to invest earlier in communities and in women who don't necessarily see themselves fully reflected in the political process. We see Daughters of the Vote as really a 10-, 15-, or 20-year investment down the road for who identifies and feels comfortable in political spaces.

On our national board, we now have an equity committee that is in fact looking at exactly this question: where can we go as a country in ensuring sufficient representation among communities that have historically not been well represented, whether they indigenous, ethnocultural, rural, or what have you?

The conversation is really robust, but we believe that our model for Daughters of the Vote was extremely successful in identifying 67 indigenous women to be part of the program, and promoting a lot of cross-cultural conversation while they were here.

• (1705)

The Chair: Awesome. Thank you so much.

We're now going to move over to Bernadette Jordan for seven minutes.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you very much to our panellists today.

Ms. Glasgow, first to you, I'd like to say congratulations for putting your name forward. We may not agree in terms of our values or our beliefs, but at the same time, I think anyone, whether male or female, whatever gender, who puts their name on a ballot deserves credit. Thank you so much for that.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: I want to ask Equal Voice a couple of questions with regard to Daughters of the Vote specifically. It was an amazing program, no question. I'm prefacing that because you know there is a "but" in there.

If you look around the table, you see that I am probably the oldest woman in the room—

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: Maybe not.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Well, at this point, right here, as an elected woman.

Daughters of the Vote really focused on a younger demographic, which was great. We want to bring younger people on line. But I think we want more than just young women. We want women of

colour. We want indigenous women. We want older women. Can you take Daughters of the Vote and maybe expand it?

I'm going to use this as an example. I was making phone calls one night. I had a woman on the phone who said, "Oh, I'm so happy that you're my representative. It's nice to see a woman there, the first woman elected in my riding. I'd love to do it, but I'm too old." I asked how old she was, and she said she was 39.

I think we've done a disservice. We often talk about getting more women elected, but we seem to focus on younger women. It's not as if that isn't great, but I think we need all women.

What can we do to encourage women of my age? I was 52. I wanted to run from the time I was 17, but it took me until I was 52 to say, "I'm not going to look back on my life and say I wish I would have." How do we get people in an older demographic or in marginalized communities to put their names forward?

Ms. Nancy Peckford: I think—

Sorry, Eleni.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: No, go ahead. We'll share the space.

Ms. Nancy Peckford: I think we have to model 21st century workplaces. In fact, the Manning Institute commissioned a survey a number of years ago. They interviewed female community leaders, mid-level professionals in their late thirties to late fifties. Women did not say they didn't want to run because of a lack of interest. They said that, in fact, they did not feel the environment would be one where they could immediately make a difference.

There is a misperception about politics: what does it mean to actually be in the political space and make a difference? But also women were not feeling compelled to leave successful professions because they misunderstood or misread what the opportunity was.

I think systems-level changes are really important, but I also think proactive mentorship is as well. I'll leave it to Eleni, as someone who has served.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: And who has lived from 39, when I was too old to get elected today.

All of that said, we have tried to be as concise as we could with whatever we've proposed by way of recommendations to the committee. There are health issues that could be addressed by doing video conferencing or other things like that. It's not only about having babies; it's also about changing the way we actually work in the system itself. There are older women who are taking care of aged parents. If they are MPs and they have to go back because one of their parents is suffering from Alzheimer's, at least that opportunity will be available for them to participate in committee.

I don't want you to take any of our recommendations as meaning that you're too old to have a baby, and that means our recommendations are not age dependent. I think you can do politics at any age, and I say that to all of the women I mentor. You can come from any profession. The whole idea is to provide that diversity of opinion at the table, to be able to come up with the best policies possible for our government, and that requires having everybody at the table, not just one generation.

Ms. Nancy Peckford: I would also ask, why didn't you run at an earlier age, and what led you to hold back. I think that's an important part of the conversation about investing in younger women.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: You actually made a good point.

I'd like you to chime in on this one as well, Ms. Glasgo. Is leaving an established career, running, and not knowing where you're going to go after that if you're not elected a barrier? Some people are lucky enough to take a leave of absence. Some people, depending on their career, have to actually quit. Then if you're not elected, where do you go?

Because you are running now, I'm not sure if that has had an impact on you in the career you've chosen. I suppose politics is the career you've chosen, but do you know what I'm saying? Is there something we can do, or is there a recommendation we can make, that people shouldn't be penalized for running, because in some cases I believe they are.

• (1710)

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: Yes.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Do you want to respond?

Ms. Michaela Glasgo: That's a tough one for me because my instinct is to say that government is never the answer. We should never be mandating anything, and it should be a grassroots, organic initiative. In this case, for me, it was a simple decision. I never thought I would run for elected office, to be honest with you, but I just kind of thought, why not? I think it's incumbent upon us as people in general that if we feel we can make a difference and that we should be involved, then we should get involved.

I think one of the greatest things about our society is that risk pays off. If you are going to take a big risk and run, I think that should be your first priority, and prioritizing your own campaign. For me, right now, my priority is to win. If I prioritize job security or—for heaven's sake—financial security, if anything, I think I'm doing myself a disservice in my own campaign. I would just say that I think the basic principles of our society will weigh out here, and the risk will pay off.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: I think that's a great point. When we look back at women who may be a little bit older and running, who may be single moms whose kids depend on their putting food on the table or whatever, it's a different conversation than for someone who doesn't have those challenges or those barriers to running.

Go ahead.

Ms. Nancy Peckford: I think it's a question of professional autonomy. In your neck of the woods, Louise Carbert did a very interesting analysis of women in Atlantic Canada. She found that because of the overrepresentation of women in the public service, a lot of them felt that even if they had the right to run, they were compromising their professional trajectories or the trajectories of their partners, their husbands; and they really couldn't. They just felt there was too much risk attached to being breadwinners, or what have you.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Am I done?

The Chair: Yes.

I'm learning lots, and you're speaking on behalf of everybody like you and me when you ask, "What happens when you're a little older?"

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Bernadette, keep on doing this. This is for us.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Eleni, thanks for understanding me. This is my—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: I was a chair once.

The Chair: I know. Thank you so much.

We're going to our second round.

Rachel, you have five minutes.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you.

Michaela, maybe just tapping into that a little bit, could you discuss some of the barriers you faced? They could be external barriers, but they also could be internal barriers. Even in your thought process or your personal life, what were the factors that played into weighing the pros and cons of running?

Ms. Michaela Glasgo: That's a good question.

I've stated quite clearly that I don't believe there were any systemic barriers to my running. I think it was just a matter of my making a decision and sticking to it. For me, personally, the biggest barrier would be that I was always questioning my competency. I don't think that's gendered, though. I think that's just being a self-reflective person. I think that's just having an ounce of.... I'm at a loss for words.

I think it's just knowing what you're capable of and honing in on that. Whether that's actually a barrier, I'm not sure, but as far as systemic barriers go, I don't think that any existed to my running.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you.

To that end as well, maybe you could talk a little bit about your view of quotas. In your remarks, you commented that you would be opposed to quotas. Why is that? If not quotas, what are other mechanisms that can be used to help encourage women to run?

Ms. Michaela Glasgo: Yes, I'm unequivocally against the quota system. I think that, especially here, being elected to one of the highest offices here in the House of Commons or in the legislatures across the country, having a quota system goes against the very principle of democracy. People should be electing who they want to see in Parliament and in legislatures, so if you're saying that the only way you're going to get there.... If my success is contingent upon this categorization of myself by nothing but my gender.... That isn't something I think of when I wake up in the morning. I don't think, oh, I'm a woman and therefore my life is going to be structured this way. No, I have to go to work; I need to make breakfast; I need to do this and whatever else.

I think that using the secondary characteristic as a primary driver in my life actually reduces me to nothing but my gender, and so to that end, I think having contested nominations is the best way to make sure women succeed. For me, just having the ability to get there, to just filing my paperwork and making sure I was ready to roll, the biggest thing was just turning off that little voice inside me that said, "Don't", which everybody has. As for an actual thing that we can all be doing, just ask women to run. If you see a competent woman sitting at the table at Tim Hortons or wherever she is, on the farm, and she's talking to you about politics or she's community-minded, why not just say, "Hey, have you ever thought about sitting on our EDA board?" Those are grassroots, organic initiatives that bring women to the table quite literally, which aren't necessarily government-imposed or some kind of structural demand.

• (1715)

Ms. Rachael Harder: For those of us who are women and are elected, what can we do to encourage women to get further involved? Expand on that a little further.

Ms. Michaela Glasgo: I think that elected women can just make sure that... We don't see women speaking on behalf of an entire group of women. I think it's incumbent upon the leaders of parties—and I think Mr. Scheer has done a very good of this—to make sure it's not just a woman speaking on "women's issues". That's something we can change the narrative on. All issues are women's issues, just as all issues are men's issues.

As to women's equality and having a seat at the table, a man should ask a woman in the same way as I would ask another woman to sit at a table with me. I think that, by changing that narrative, elected women and elected people in general can have a greater impact than they think, because if we're constantly giving an economic portfolio to a man, or assuming that a woman wouldn't want that portfolio and that she would want, say, status of women instead, that's actually where we regress. Just making sure everything is open and available to people is the best step.

The Chair: You have about 45 seconds.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Michaela, as a woman who is running, you clearly have some experience. You're out there, you're knocking on doors, you're engaging with the general public, but you also have a perspective as a woman who's not quite elected yet. So my question is this. Would you say there are certain women who are better suited to politics than others?

Ms. Michaela Glasgo: I think the women who are better suited to politics are the ones who want to run. No, I don't think there are women who are necessarily better suited. However, I don't think you should be pushed, and that's why I think, coming back to the quota system, that's what we get. When there is a quota system, parties will seek out these women to run, and they might be saying they're okay with being stay-at-home moms, engineers, or whatever else.

Sorry—

The Chair: No, it's okay.

Ms. Michaela Glasgo: —I do think it's really important that we seek out women who want to run, and I think the best kind of woman to be running is the one who is driven to and loves her community.

The Chair: Okay, we're now going to go on to our next five minutes with Sean Fraser.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Excellent. I just have one question, and then I'll be sharing my time with my colleague Ms. Nassif.

[Translation]

Thank you for being with us today. Your testimony is very interesting and very important.

My question is for Ms. Bakopanos.

[English]

On the issue of quotas, you mentioned that personally you support them. We heard at great length during our economic study that the 30% threshold is where the conversation changes and it makes a meaningful difference. Companies make more money, and governments could make better decisions. There's an interesting sort of butting of heads between two ideas here.

How can we empower governments by having women cross that 30% threshold, without disenfranchising voters, whether it's people who vote in their nomination contests or voters who elect the candidate of their choice? I'm supremely interested in seeing us reach parity in the House of Commons. I think it would change everything about politics, but I also don't want to compromise the will of the electorate to choose their local representatives.

Do you have a suggestion on how we might marry these two interests?

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: I'm also going to give my personal opinion.

To begin with, we mentioned the legislation before the House. We're talking about having incentives, rather than disincentives, for political parties in terms of how to increase the number of women who will be running.

I'd also like to say we can't do it without men, without the 49% of men who have been through the experience. I have also had male mentors, by the way, and quite important ones. I had Robert Bourassa, Jean Chrétien, and Jean Charest, to give you a few examples. We need the help of men. Feminism isn't about being against men. I want to put that on the table. I don't believe in that. Feminism has changed over the years, and we have a lot of men who are very supportive.

We need to work together to make sure there are enough voices around the table and on the ground. Never forget that there are many women working behind the scenes in politics, who have never aspired to run for office but who have done all of the work on the ground to do so. At least 80% of my volunteers were women, and this continues to be the case in general in most election campaigns.

It's going to take a new way of thinking about politics. Again, I'm going to go to what I said in the beginning. When we talk about public service, the people will see it as everybody coming forward to serve the public, rather than to serve a certain group, ideology, or feminism, if I can put it that way.

• (1720)

Ms. Nancy Peckford: There are consequences in every election. We have a House of Commons now in which two-thirds of the members are new, non-incumbent, first-time electees, and we have 27% female representation there. The possible turnover in a House in which two-thirds of members are new is very low. Obviously we're going to see quite a few incumbents get re-elected. The capacity to turn over the House and potentially elect more women will take another decade. I really think if we break through 30% in the next election, that's the best we can do numerically.

Every election presents an opportunity to get more women in, but the minute we forfeit that opportunity, we're going to wait a decade because of how seats turn over. We have a major incumbency challenge. Quite frankly, in the last election, apart from the New Democratic Party, no party hit it out of the park, and we are now reaping those consequences. We really have to think long game here.

Mr. Sean Fraser: I have no time left and Ms. Nassif has a question. I want to hear more, though.

Ms. Nancy Peckford: Yes.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: We can pick it up after.

[Translation]

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Thank you again, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank our witnesses, especially Ms. Bakopanos, who is from Montreal. She's my friend. She was an MP from 1993 to 2006, if I'm not mistaken. So she served 13 years as a member of Parliament.

Ms. Bakopanos, tell us about the barriers you encountered as a candidate, a woman of Greek origin, with an immigrant background.

You mentioned that being a woman is a barrier. Yes. You know that I am a mother of triplets, that I ran for nomination twice—which I won—before entering politics at the same time as I was in school—I have two degrees—and all throughout my political involvement.

Tell us about the other barriers you faced in 1993 and what has changed now about being a female MP.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: Many things have changed, but we don't have time to go over everything. I'll tell you two things.

I myself come from a more or less macho cultural community—let's say that in a very nice way. I was the first woman of Greek origin elected to the House of Commons. So I was a phenomenon in a way for the men in my community. There are 15 of them who would have challenged my nomination. However, Mr. Chrétien, who was open-minded, received a mandate from Liberal Party members to choose women in order to reach 30% of female candidates. We talked about this earlier. It was the members who gave him that mandate, the members of the party. He didn't decide that himself. It all helped me and the riding I had.

The barriers for women who come from cultural communities are greater, in my opinion, than for other women from—

[English]

I don't want to say from the mainstream, but usually from the anglophone population. I got elected in a francophone riding in

which women were actually considered.... Seventy percent of my first riding and 80% of my second riding—I had two ridings—was francophone, and having a female representative was not an issue. It was actually an advantage to be a woman. The francophone voters saw that as an advantage. The fact that I had young children was a disadvantage in my community. They thought I had abandoned my husband and children to do something else.

I could go on and on, but I think you've dealt with some of the barriers.

[Translation]

Mrs. Eva Nassif: That's not what I was asking.

I wanted to know what has changed between 1993 and now. Name one thing that seems different to you.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: Are you talking about what's changed these days?

[English]

The Chair: Okay, so what I'm going to do—

Mrs. Eva Nassif: A one-minute extension.

The Chair: I've already given—

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Look, we've extended the hours at the House of Commons. We can extend by one minute.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: I'll say one thing.

The Chair: I'm going to give you some ideas. We've gone a minute and 15 seconds over, because you're awesome.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: Thank you.

The Chair: We will give you another 30 seconds, if you don't mind. I'm going to flip it over to the CPC to ask one question, then that will end the day.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Thank you.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: I will answer once—parity. The fact that we have parity in government around the cabinet table gives you role models for people to aspire to.

• (1725)

The Chair: Okay. Do you have one more question? If not....

Mrs. Eva Nassif: I can have it.

The Chair: I know you could help, Eva.

I'm going to help here. This has been a fantastic panel. I've listened to all three of you, thinking, "That's me, especially with Bernadette. That's me. That's me. That's me." I would really like to thank you for coming today.

My only question is, when are we going to do another Daughters of the Vote? That is the next question.

It's awesome to have Michaela.

I'm that hoping Delany Leitch is out there in the world listening to this. I had Delany as one of my students and daughters. I'd call her my daughter, and people would look at me. She was my Daughter of the Vote. When are we planning to do that again? What's the plan on that?

Ms. Nancy Peckford: We are actively working to secure commitments for three Daughters of the Vote with both our private and public sector partners, so that, in fact, we would do that in 2020 and 2021, and really try to institute it as a major flagship program for Equal Voice. We believe there are 338 amazing, politically diverse, interesting women who are ready to take the challenge each and every year—of all ages.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: And we need your help.

The Chair: Of all ages, yes. Can you make sure there's a group for over 40?

A voice: No age.

The Chair: I would really like to thank you. This has been an excellent panel. We've had two excellent panels today. We're learning lots.

I'm just going to remind you that today is Thursday and that we're going to be reconvening on Tuesday, of course. We're going to have the Samara Group with Jane Hilderman, Dr. Louise Carbert, Dr. Jeanette Ash, Dr. Silvia Bashevkin, Dr. William Cross, Dr. Sarah Childs, Dr. Rosie Campbell, and Dr. Melanee Thomas next week.

The clerk will be sending that out. I'm sorry. I did not realize that not everybody had the list. I had the list and just did not think anything further of it. Everyone will receive the witness list so you can see how it breaks down. I believe we have some awesome stuff happening.

Go ahead, Anne.

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Thank you for distributing the list.

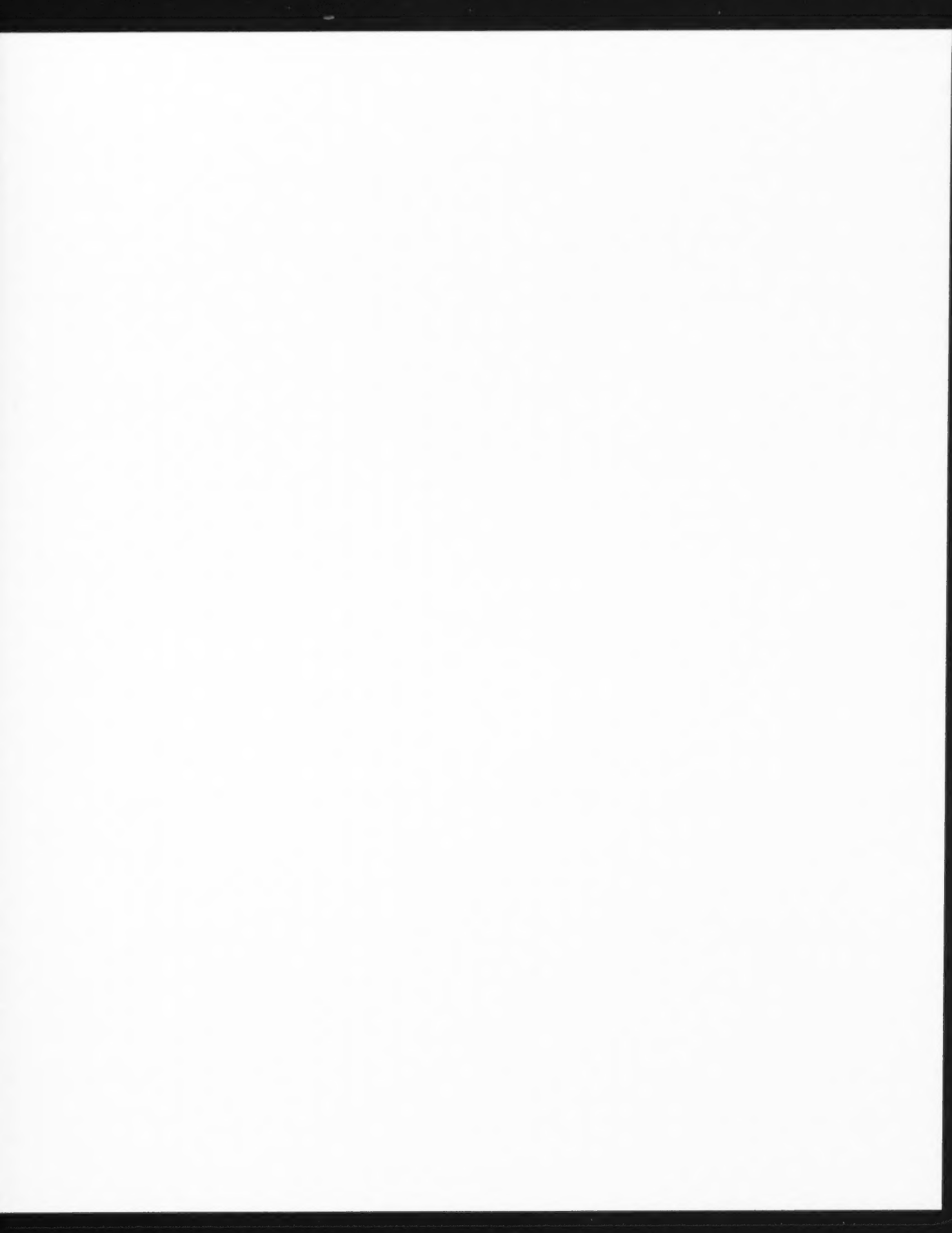
Can we still make suggestions, or is the list already complete for the various upcoming meetings?

[English]

The Chair: In a case like that, the list has been completed. All of the things were brought in. If there is an issue where one person put forward by the NDP cannot come, we'll give you an opportunity to suggest someone else.

Thank you very much, everybody.

Today's meeting is adjourned.



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